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AUTHOR Parker, Franklin
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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how Israel's educational system attempts to deal with major social, geographic, religious, economic, and political problems. Problems are presented in two main categories--internal and external. Internal problems include high immigration levels, religious and cultural differences among various Jewish sects and between Jews and Israeli Arabs, a high inflation rate, negative attitudes among Israeli youth regarding Israel's social and political policies, and the paucity of Israel's natural resources when compared with her Arab neighbors. External problems center on Israel's location amidst unfriendly Arab nations. Israel's traditional education system consists of free and compulsory education for ages five through 16, free education from ages 16 through 18, vocational schools, professional and technical schools, universities with selective entrance requirements, and education for Israeli Arabs under a separate but equal policy. Many innovations have been developed by the Ministry of Education and Culture to help those citizens whose needs are not being met within this traditional system. Innovations include upgrading rural Israeli Arab schools, recruiting teachers to serve in rural areas, designating rural teaching an alternative to army service, offering Hebrew language classes, hiring university students as tutors in elementary and secondary schools, and training young mothers with little or no formal education to work with other women in rural areas on topics such as child development. (DB)

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Israel, Schools, and Arab Conflict in the Middle East

by Franklin Parker

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Franklin Parker
Benedum Professor of Education
602 Allen Hall, Evansdale Campus
West Virginia University
Morgantown, WV 26506

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By Franklin Parker

We were 39 US educators from 14 states, most from New York and California, mainly high school social studies teachers and some higher education professors, mainly women, average age about 40, of mixed faiths but mostly Jewish--attending the fourth Middle East Studies Seminar sponsored by the Israeli Teachers Union, the American Federation of Teachers, and the New York-based National Committee for Middle East Studies. It was July 1980 and hot, a moist 90-degree average but with cool nights on the Tel Aviv University campus where our lectures and discussions were held.

Israel's friends say that this inverted thumblike sliver of a country about the size of New Jersey is the only democracy in the Middle East. Arab enemies, themselves former European colonies, see Israel as an unwanted western-imposed, imperialistic, expansionist mini-state on the eastern Mediterranean shore of Asia. This embattled semi-desert dot on the crossroads where Europe, Africa, and Asia meet is bordered by 4 the many Arab countries who overwhelm it in size and population and who (except for Egypt since 1977) deny its right to exist and vow its destruction: Lebanon to the north, Syria and Jordan to the East, and Egypt to the southwest.

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"It is all Moses' fault," an old Israeli from Russia told us with a twinkle in his eye as we waited in line in a Tel Aviv bank. "He made a mistake. He pointed north from Sinai and meant to say 'Canada," but because he stammered, he said 'Canaan' instead." We laughed, nearly missing his last quip, "The Arabs don't want us here."

Uneasy, unwanted, burdened with a 40% defense budget, but determined to remain the national homeland for Jews who wandered for 19 centuries, Israel's population grew from 650,000 (600,000 Jews) at statehood in 1948 to 3.5 million today: 3,037,000 Jews, about 500,000 Israeli Arabs (446,000 Muslims, 84,000 Christians, and 46,000 Druzes, a Muslim offshoot, and others). Israeli Arabs (who are citizens) are not to be confused with the over a million Palestinian Arabs (mostly Muslims) who live in the military-occupied territories Israel gained in the 1967 war begun by the Arab states: 650,000 in the West Bank of the Jordan River (Judea and Shomron), 400,000 in the Gaza Strip (which was Egyptian, 1948-67), and a few (mostly Druzes) in the Golan Heights near Syria.

Problem-ridden Israel (we will return to its external Arab problems) contains Jews of European/American background, called Ashkenazim, and Jews of Asian/African background, called Sephardim. The smaller number but more urban and culturally advanced Western Ashkenazim more quickly adjusted and dominated economically and politically the more numerous rural, darker, Eastern Sephardim in Israel's agricultural mechanization and modern industries. For example, because their parents came from mainly Muslim countries with extended village families which kept girls at home, 25% of young Sephardic women were recently found to be illiterate.

Complicating Ashkenazi-Sephardi differences are religious differences among ultra-orthodox, orthodox, and secular Jews. Israel is a Jewish state that permits freedom of worship to other religions. There are also differences between Jews and Israeli Arabs. Affluent Arabs fled Israel on statehood (1948), leaving few leaders and teachers for the remaining more numerous poor Arabs living mainly in traditional extended family villages. An Arab head of a teacher training center told us that, while Israeli Arabs have made remarkable progress, they are still

discriminated against when compared to Israeli Jews. They are citizens, can vote, have an elected member in Parliament (Knesset), have separate and supposedly equal schools, but feel they are not trusted in being excluded from the Israeli army (Israelis fear Arabs as a potential fifth column). The gap is narrowing but still exists between Israeli Arabs and Jews in school achievement and in social and economic progress. Our Arab speaker, whose candor we admired, said, "Jews do not trust Arabs and this hurts us."

A 1976 study shows that although a third of all Israeli Arabs are in school, their educational attainment is lower than that of Jews. For example, those completing school through the university entrance exam (Bagrut) include 24% of Jews, 8% of Arabs; illiterates over age 14: 9% of Jews, 36.5% of Arabs; unqualified teachers: 16% of Jewish teachers, 43% of Arab teachers; white collar workers: 41% of Jews, 14.5% of Arabs; families who own refrigerators: 98% of Jews, 54% of Arabs; families with telephones: 52% of Jews, 7% of Arabs. The study found that Arab youths' view of Israel becomes more negative as they grow older.

The school system further illustrates Israel's internal problems. A centralized Ministry of Education and Culture with six decentralized school regions is responsible for the curriculum, textbooks, exams, and the recruitment and training of teachers and other school personnel. City, town, and rural school councils are responsible for buildings, equipment, and textbook purchases. Imitating the US, the old 8-4 plan is now almost completely superseded by a 6-year elementary school (ages 6-12); 3-year junior high school (12-15), and 3-year senior high school (15-18), after which either a school-leaving certificate or a matriculation (university entrance Bagrut) exam is taken. Education is free through age 18 and compulsory for ages 5-16 (age 5-6 is a free kindergarten year). The several types of Jewish schools include state secular schools, enrolling 65% of all students; state religious schools, 25%; ultra-orthodox schools

(Agudat Israel), 6.5%; and the rest divided among the kibbutzim (communal agricultural and industrial units), army, and other schools.

Preschool enrollment in 1976 was high: 83% of all 3-year-olds, 90% of all 4-year-olds, and 96% of all 5-year-olds. Instruction is in Hebrew. English is introduced as the first foreign language in the fourth (sometimes fifth) year, and the second language choice is Arabic or French.

Arab education is separate for mainly geographic and language reasons since most Israeli Arabs still live in extended family villages apart from the urbanized Jews. Arabs and Jews have the same school ladder, years of free (14 years) and compulsory (12 years) education, and school-leaving and matriculation exams. Instruction, however, is in Arabic, with Hebrew begun in the third year and English in the fifth year. The Ministry works out with Arab educators an Arab culture syllabus and Arabic textbooks.

Many acknowledge that Arabs are disadvantaged, more because of their traditional village life than because of overt discrimination. Israeli-born Jewish children (sabras) grow up speaking Hebrew; Arabic-speaking children must make an extra effort to learn Hebrew as a second language in order to succeed in Israeli society.

A 1976 study showed low female Arab enrollment: 42% females to 58% males in Arab elementary schools and 25% females to 75% males in Arab secondary schools. It is difficult to keep good teachers in poor villages; they naturally prefer to work in urban areas. Unfortunately, in 1980, there was an oversupply of Arab teachers. The Ministry has tried to close the gap between better Jewish and poorer Arab schools, a gap heightened by the Palestinian issue.

For Israeli Arabs, as for US minority youths, education and teaching are avenues for advancement. Arab parents urge their children, more than do Jewish parents, to achieve academically. Israeli Arabs generally prefer

academic over blue-collar vocational education, even though fewer reach higher education and the professions. Of those in school, 52% of Jews as against 10% of Arabs enroll in vocational education because of job availability in Israel's rapid industrialization.

At age 18, having completed either a school-leaving exam or the matriculation exam (university entrance Bagrut), a typical Jewish boy is drafted into the army for 3 years and an unmarried girl for 2 years. The army is itself a large-scale educator and an effective assimilator of advanced Ashkenazi, disadvantaged Sephardi, and also the village Druzes (the Druzes asked and were allowed to be drafted).

Israel's 7 independent universities (1977-78 enrollments) are Hebrew University, 13,180; Technion, Israel Institute of Technology, 8,760; Tel Aviv University, 13,530; Bar-Ilan, 8,150; Haifa, 5,920; Ben Gurion, 3,960; and Weiamann Institute of Science, 560. There are also some 18,000 students in 267 Yeshivot (Talmudic colleges to prepare rabbis), mostly in Jerusalem. The total 72,060 higher education students pay rather high tuition and many work.

Israel has tried to close the gap between the advanced Ashkenazi students (45%) and the less advanced Sephardi students (55%). Since 1970, young mothers, mainly from North African countries, have been taught to use games with their children; 30 young mothers with little education but much potential were used to train other mothers in small groups. Encouraging Sephardi children to talk helped their later learning. Another experiment is to pay selected university students to tutor disadvantaged children twice weekly. Some 9,000 university students will be hired in this paid tutor program in September 1980. Army life and

schools have also helped, as have the rising number of Ashkenazi-Sephardi marriages (27% of all marriages in 1979).

Another continuing educational problem is how to teach about the Jewish religion to the nearly three-quarters nonreligious state school students. The Ministry developed for them a "Jewish consciousness" curriculum but with uncertain results. The need is to find ways to teach what a Jew is, the meaning of Israel's troubled history, and the responsibilities of citizens in a country under constant seige.

After independence and increased immigration of world Jews, thousands of unqualified teachers had to be hired. While many of these have since qualified through in-service training, some unqualified teachers remain among Israel's 65,000 teachers. The training colleges turn out fewer than the 4,000 new teachers needed annually. Those unqualified teachers still being hired are let go if they do not begin to qualify in 2 years. The Ministry has asked the army for some 500 drafted young women. After 3 months' training, they teach in remote areas in lieu of 2 years' army service. Many continue teaching after leaving the army and, with in-service training, become certified.

Although the Teachers' Union is Israel's largest union, teachers have lost status in recent years, more so among Ashkenazim than Sephardim. Sephardim now comprise 35% of teacher training enrollment. Incentives of housing and other subsidies are used to get good teachers to frontier development towns. After 4 years' service, many remain there.

Teachers are civil servants with one salary scale from kindergarten to training college teachers. There are salary steps according to educational training and raises for in-service training (which is popular) and additional training. Kindergarten to 6th grade teachers work 30 hours weekly; 7th to 12th grade teachers work 24 hours weekly. Teacher training colleges turn out skilled elementary teachers, some of whom are short on

subject content. University schools of education turn out good subject content high school teachers, some of whom are short on teaching skills. Salaries in Israel are linked by professional groups and rise with the cost of living. Teachers' salaries have been linked with engineers' salaries. A Ministry official complained to us that the Teachers' Union agitated about money issues when they should have concentrated on raising educational quality.

The 230 kibbutzim, or cooperative communities, run their own schools and have their own teachers but use Ministry guidelines, syllabi, and textbooks. Important beyond their small membership of under 4% of Israel's total population, the kibbutzim (Hebrew for group) exert a large influence for their economic success in agriculture, small industries, and tourist inns; for their strategic location guarding borders and important roads and installations; as a place to absorb new and untutored immigrants; and for their ideology, socialist in spirit and Zionist in promoting Israel as a homeland.
national. Everything is collectively owned: land, buildings, farms, industry, equipment. Members receive all their needs--food, housing, and other necessities, but no salary, although they may draw money for travel and needed personal purchases. Management is by committees, which also make work assignments but take into account individual preferences. Many jobs are rotated, although teachers and other trained members stay with their specialty. While US communes of the 1960s and '70s were short-lived, Israel's kibbutzim have lasted for decades and most have prospered.

We visited Barkai, a 180-member kibbutz with 120 others who include probationers waiting to become members and some short and long-term visitors. Founded in 1947 and affiliated with the left-wing but noncommunist Mapam Party (a kibbutz is invariably affiliated with one of Israel's many political parties), Barkai's economy is based on a plastics factory, poultry, and agriculture. Our escort, Naomi Pearlman, a bright friendly

woman of about age 50, left her well-off South African family in an early ideological aliyah (Hebrew for "going forth"; i.e., immigration) to Israel. Her shocked parents were reconciled when, on a visit, they saw her happy with her Barkai-found husband, children, and communal life. Besides regular work (most jobs are rotated), successively more important committee duties led to her election for two years as Barkai's secretary (i.e., chief executive).

She introduced us to probationers who had just been elected kibbutz members. Each had worked out with a committee the division of personal savings so that, as a communal members, each was fully committed to Barkai and Barkai fully committed to each of them.

We saw another communal bond in the baby houses where, soon after birth, tiny tots live and play in small groups, boys and girls together, cared for by trained persons, visited by their parents. Nursed by their own mothers and knowing and being with their natural parents some hours each day (small apartments are assigned to members), Barkai children prefer living with their peers in small-unit children's houses. Asked if sex problems ever arose, Naomi laughed, "Rarely," explaining, "They grow up on the potty together." Her comment fitted what we had read of kibbutzniks (kibbutz children), that their close peer relationships and communal life that makes every adult something of a parent, help form their uniquely strong characters and generally wholesome personalities.

Their high educational level is said to be due partly to well-trained teachers who are kibbutz members, teach under Ministry regulations and syllabi, but whose salaries go to the kibbutz. More creative, progressive, and dedicated, kibbutz teachers are more concerned with giving broader knowledge than teaching to the narrow Bagrut exam. Yet kibbutz children do well on the Bagrut and many, after army service, are helped by the kibbutz to pay for their university studies. Prestige remains high for

kibbutzniks, many of whom rise to high positions in the army, Knesset, and Cabinet.

Another cooperative institution is the moshav, where individuals own their own farms, live in their own family homes, but cooperate in equipment purchases and use and in marketing. Moshavim grew from 55 in 1948 to 350 today, containing about 4% of the population, including many Sephardim, since its cooperative farm community fits the extended family characteristics of African/Oriental Jews. Moshav children attend regular local state secular, religious, and orthodox schools.

The army as an important educator, assimilator, and socializer integrat some 90% of 18-year-old Jewish men and 50% of 18-year-old Jewish women: Sephardim and Ashkenazim, rural and urban, sabras and immigrant youths. It helps the more numerous and more disadvantaged Sephardim adjust to the Ashkenazim-dominated society. Some 5,000 recruits a year learn Hebrew and Israeli history and geography. Since at least a certificate of elementary education is required before discharge, some 1,200 soldiers a year spend 3 months in basic education courses. Some women soldiers teach children in remote areas; some men soldiers join them in teaching disadvantaged children. Soldiers also help educate and socialize recent immigrant civilians and, since 1970, have worked with delinquent youths.

Soldiers are seen everywhere, mostly in and some out of uniform, with men often carrying a weapon. We were told soon after arrival that our safe movement in Tel Aviv and Israel was a result of army security. Few gripe about defense, but many wonder about spending 40% of the budget for it. The inflation rate is 125%. An Israeli professor and his wife, returned from a year on leave, told us in a taxi we shared how shocked they were to find that prices had more than doubled.

Despite normal bustle of daily life, rush of traffic, roar of new high-rise building construction, pushing and shoving to get on buses in this

highly urbanized society (Tel Aviv, Haifa, and Jerusalem contain most of the people), there is worry about inflation, defense, and terrorist attacks. This uncertainty about the future was expressed by Ammi, 26-year-old American-born Israeli counselor to our group. Devoted to Israel, a talented, sensitive drama student who wants to be an entertainer, Ammi went with his mother to Israel at age 16. To be fully accepted, he learned to speak flawless Hebrew and did his 3 years in the army. Speaking for himself, he said, "No one really likes to give 3 years of his life to the army." With dual US-Israeli citizenship, Ammi wants the US to fall back on if things go badly. Beth, young woman counselor to our group and also American-born, feels the same way. That more than a few Israelis feel this uncertainty is seen in the growing number leaving the country. Some young Israelis particularly are questioning Israel's call on their service and sacrifice. They question the treatment of Israeli Arabs, disagree with such hardliners as Prime Minister Menachem Begin who hold on to disputed territory Israel gained in the 1967 war, and question Israel's retributive strikes on terrorist bases inside Lebanon. These questions neither Israeli schools nor society nor their religion have been able to answer fully: Who is a Jew? What is a Jew? Why is there a Jewish state in Israel? How can and why should relatively few Jews fight off hordes of Arabs in 22 Arab states who don't want them?

These questions may have been partly answered by two encounters we had, the first with our last Tel Aviv University lecturer on the Palestine Liberation Organization. He painted a grim picture of an uncompromising political terrorist organization founded and dedicated to eliminating Israel and using the miseries of (over 1 million displaced Palestinian Arabs (who fled or lost their homes in 1948 and in later Israeli-Arab wars) to gain world sympathy for Palestinians and world animosity for Israel. The image of the PLO and its leader, Yasir Arafat, has risen in the UN and elsewhere

while Israel's image has been tarnished by PLO propaganda, Palestinian misery, and Israel's seeming intransigence in holding territories gained in the 1967 war.

"Where does hope lie for Israel?" one of our group asked as the lecturer concluded. He answered in effect: Israel's only hope lies with Jews and other friends in the West who support Israel and ultimately with Israelis of my generation--with their support, sacrifice, and taxes. The longer Israel holds on, the more its Arab foes will have to accept its existence and the more they will be ready to acknowledge it and ignore the calls of extremists for its destruction.

He said this and more with some emotion and candor. We were stilled, realizing that at present his was perhaps the only real answer.

The second encounter, midpoint in our 4-week course, was with an old Israeli we met on a boat trip from Tel Aviv to Jaffa. His active grandson had been climbing over topdeck tables, benches, and us. Rescuing us from this playful mayhem and noting that we were visitors, the man engaged us in conversation. We learned that he had recently visited Egypt, his birthplace, and had received royal treatment in the aftermath of the Egyptian-Israeli peace talks. We commented on how President Sadat's November 1977 trip to Israel and Prime Minister Begin's return visit to Egypt dramatically reversed over 30 years of animosity. "Are you optimistic about Israel?" we asked. He shrugged, smiled, and said, "We have to be optimistic. We started from nothing and we made a state." Then he added pointedly, before taking his grandson to see the skyline, "Churchill didn't want us, Roosevelt didn't want us, nobody wanted us. I tell you one thing: If Israel had existed in the 1930s, there would never have been a Holocaust."

The old Israeli was pugnaciously optimistic. We left Israel hoping he was right but privately concerned about the future of this embattled state.